

It is really important for your care that the information you give us is as full and accurate as possible.

This leaflet has been devised to help patients and their visitors to understand MRSA. We hope to answer your concerns by concentrating on the most commonly asked questions. If you have any more questions please ask your doctor or nurse.

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS AND VISITORS

# Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)



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## 1 What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. Staphylococcus Aureus is a bacterium (germ) that is often found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people, where it causes no problems. However if Staphylococcus Aureus enters the skin, commonly through a wound or during an invasive procedure, an infection can occur.

MRSA is a Staphylococcus Aureus that is resistant to (not killed by) some of the common antibiotics that are usually used to treat these infections.

## 2 How is MRSA diagnosed?

MRSA infection is diagnosed by sending specimens such as swabs, urine, or blood to the microbiology department, to find out what micro-organism is causing the infection and what antibiotics will be effective in treating it.

## 3 How does MRSA affect people

MRSA does not usually affect healthy people, however when a person is unwell and their immunity is low they may acquire MRSA. This may lead to the development of an infection, which can be more difficult to treat and can mean a delay in recovery from the infection. For example, a wound can take longer to heal.

## 4 How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread in two main ways:

**Airborne route** – this occurs when skin scales from a person colonized with MRSA (ie a person who is carrying the germ but is not harmed by it) are inhaled or land on another person's open wound.

**Direct contact** – usually spread from one person to another by people who have not washed their hands thoroughly.

## 5 How can the spread of MRSA be minimised?

The best way to stop the spread of MRSA is by hand washing. All our staff are aware of how important this is. Any staff who have patient contact attend yearly training to ensure they are aware of the precautions that need to be taken. They are trained to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water (if hands are already clean they can be cleaned with alcoholic handrub) when caring for patients with MRSA, and from time

to time audits are carried out to ensure that our strict guidelines are being followed.

We have a team of dedicated cleaning staff who cover all areas of the hospice, and the cleaning is monitored regularly by our managers.

## 6 How is MRSA treated?

If a patient is colonised with MRSA ( has the germ on their skin or in their nose) they are given a treatment regimen that may include hair washes, baths or showers, nose cream and antiseptic powder to be applied to the armpits and groin. The treatment regime lasts for one week.

If a patient is infected with MRSA the doctor will look at the specimen results, which will tell them which antibiotics will be effective in treating the MRSA infection.

## 7 How will I know when the MRSA has been successfully treated?

Following treatment, further specimens will be taken to see whether the MRSA has been removed. Three clear specimens are usually required. Treatment may be repeated if unsuccessful the first time.

## 8 How will I be affected if I have MRSA?

You will be cared for in a single room until the colonisation or infection has cleared. This is called barrier nursing. While you are being barrier nursed, you are welcome to go into the garden where there is no risk of infecting others. If you would like to go into the Pilgrim Room (chapel), please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Having MRSA will not delay you going home.

## 9 How will MRSA affect my family and friends?

Healthy people are at little risk of catching MRSA. They should cover any cuts with a waterproof dressing and wash their hands after visiting the person with MRSA.

Some visitors, such as those bringing new born babies for example, will be discouraged from visiting until the treatment for MRSA has cleared the infection.

If any of your family or friends are worried, they should seek advice from visiting their own GP or the practice nurse.

## 10 Do I have to take any special care at home?

No. Generally you can continue to lead a normal life and get about outside the home as usual. Your doctor or nurse will inform you if there are any special precautions you need to take.

You should practice good hygiene including not sharing personal items such as flannels, toothbrush and towels and remember to wash your hands after going to the toilet.

If one of your visitors has a medical problem which might make them especially susceptible to MRSA you should warn them in advance, so they can check with their GP whether they can visit you at home.

## 11 Who should I tell that I have MRSA?

It is a good idea to tell any healthcare professionals you come into contact with (e.g GP, hospital doctor or hospice staff) that you have MRSA so that if you contract an infection they can check whether it is MRSA and decide what antibiotics to give you.

You also should tell the carers that come into your home so that they can give you the right care.

## Remember

- MRSA is a bacterium that has become resistant to commonly used antibiotics. However, there are treatments available for it such as special antibiotics, cream, powders and washes.
- MRSA can cause infections but most people are colonised and not infected with MRSA (they have the germ without it causing them any harm).
- When a person colonised with MRSA is receiving medical and nursing care, such as intravenous therapy, or has a wound, the MRSA can contaminate this area leading to an infection.
- MRSA is spread by the airborne or person to person route and by unwashed hands.
- MRSA is not harmful to fit healthy persons.
- To prevent the spread of MRSA, patients are cared for in a single room.
- The best way to prevent the spread of MRSA is by thorough hand washing by everyone entering the ward and entering or leaving the patient's room.